



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE DOCILITY OF THE FIGHTER.

GEORGE MALCOLM STRATTON.

IN SPEAKING with thoughtful men concerning the present war, one hears of the place which fighting holds in human nature. War it is said is bred into men, never to be removed, part of their blood and bone and marrow. And such a creed is widespread, in books and in the living words of those who are far from cynical. Among my neighbors are men of outlook and generous impulse, yet one of them believes that human nature is essentially homicidal, and that any who are unwilling to accept war, which is the expression of this nature, must seek an abode upon some other planet. Another friend, holding with Hobbes that the compelling power of life is selfishness, believes that nations, driven as they forever are by this spirit, can be met and held only by force of arms. War, then, must be looked upon leniently, even in our abhorrence, as the appropriate utterance of an instinct whose fibres reach into the very heart and are not to be touched by drug or surgery. Such are the convictions of men versed in the world's life, candid, willing to face unflattering truth, asking that in equal candor we judge the conduct of nations by the grim standard of reality.

One might give even a juster view of the springs of human conduct without changing their conclusion, save to strengthen it. For fighting is indeed an instinct bred in by milleniums of savage ancestry and by an endless brute inheritance beyond, and it is still sustained in many ways. Not only is the fighting-spirit seconded by greed, but often no external object of desire—no ponderable good to be gained—is in mind, and men fight in a red and improvident anger, as well as from the sheer lust of conflict, feeling toward their destructive effort something of an artist's love of art for art's sake. Sober human nature

itself and not a satirist sketched that early ideal of bliss in Valhalla, where, with inexhaustible mead and boar's flesh, men might enjoy a stout daily clash.

But the war-spirit is nursed by feelings that are still farther removed from all that is covetous. Men fight not only for love of fighting, and for love of self, but for love of others. Chivalry joins with cupidity to preserve and spur the fighting instinct. Men go to war, not from ungovernable self-will alone, but because they have merged their wills with others, and forgetting all personal gain—nay, ungrudgingly making sacrifice of all they value most—rush to protect or to further the great institution that is the mother of them all.

Thus a less sordid view of human nature, with full acceptance of its generous strain, seems to find war doubly and trebly entrenched—entrenched behind greed, behind the love of risk and tense adventure, behind loyalty. And therefore is not the effort to destroy it, or even to drive it back and make this world, if not a peaceable, yet a less quarrelsome place, foredoomed to failure? Is not war's very nobility, its contempt for petty prudence, its glowing fusion with conscience and aspiration—which has long made it the symbol of all high endeavor—does not all this give war an equal place with Andes and with Ararat?

Massive as such an argument might become, deep as is its sounding of the human heart, a more careful survey shows that it cannot stand. The hope, rising into confidence with some, that the attack upon war is not a futile thing—not like preaching to earthquake or tornado—this hope may be rebuked, but surely not by the facts of human nature taken more near their full. May we then for the time neglect all else—neglect all difficulties of education, of organizing, of administering, of profit and loss, which indeed are great and many—and consider only those difficulties that are supposed to be central, lying in instinct and in what is regarded as the inalterable constitution of the mind. Nor need one's thought in such a survey thin out to subtlety and abstraction, but rather find

Vol. XXVI.—No. 3.

its index to human nature in the rounded facts of man's conduct in shop and street and camp.

And so beginning our survey, we observe at once that in all the more civilized parts of the entire world the individual has been schooled to control his fighting instinct. In the infinite network of irritating conditions in which we personally move—rights pressing hard upon rights, lust having perpetually to see and forego its object, greed eyeing open possessions everywhere, pride daily wounded and resentful—in the midst of these that are as bugles to the fighting impulse, our normal citizen lives without assault. The inner, and in a measure the outer, workings of contention still are there: he may show jealousy, anger, a sour and settled malice; he may at times be subtle, tart of tongue, litigious; but with it all he has himself so far under control that he makes no bodily onslaught. He is converted to a really civilized warfare, in which he discards not merely dum-dum bullets, but all bullets, all means of ripping soul from body; refraining not only from mutilating the dead but from mutilating the living; using the weapons of rebuke, persuasion, public opinion, and, when all these fail, of police and court impartial to his separate and particular good. What his schooling has done for him, what changes it has wrought in the inner machinery that controls his outward conduct, is shown by the contrast between him and the men who have early left or have never entered his school, or by exception have been resistant to its influence—the savage, the criminal, the brawler in the frontier saloon. Whatever we may hold as to the depth or permanence of this change, his conduct has undergone a transformation. A violent and instinctive mode of expressing his emotions has been brought to bay; the instinct has not been killed, but has been bound over to keep the peace. And yet after childhood, and for all who are not exceptionally intractable, the forces that check and redirect his physical conduct are themselves not physical. Whether the forces come from within or from without, whether they be of self-control, or of control by

the expectation, the approval, the censure of others, they exert a wholly immaterial compulsion. Otherwise our estate would indeed be dark; more than half our population would be needed to suppress the rest; and a still larger force, brought from heaven-knows-where, would be needed to control the controllers; and so on without end. The instinctive combativeness of the individual has thus experienced a profound alteration.

Nor has the change been confined wholly to the person; for it has spread over many an organization that once was of chronic and infectious pugnacity. Thus the family, the clan, the tribe, were at one time fighting units, of pacific influence inward, but outward all bristling for the fray. Tribe fought tribe in Arabia, until Mohammed gave them a common creed and government. Montague kept peace with Montague, but bit thumb and drew on any Capulet. And the feuds that still sound faintly from the mountains of our South are present echoes of this ancient faith.

This conversion of corporate life, whereby the peace that looked wholly toward its own members came later to face toward bodies without, is shown also in the older cities. The boys of the "auld toon" in Edinburgh having bloody "bicker" with those of the new, shows as in parody an early state. Quarter gives battle to quarter, wherein neighborhood often is strengthened by ties of blood, as in Syrian towns of our day. But not only has some organized part of the city waged war on other parts, but the city as a whole has fought with other cities, Athens against Sparta, Florence against Pisa, until these local rivalries came no longer to open broil. Thus the trend has been to sweep war out to an ever more distant border—from the quarter of the town to the town wall, from the town wall to the border of some petty kingdom, from the petty kingdom out to the boundary of some enormous empire. The British Isles, Germany, Italy, France—each has at some time been a mere aggregation of Balkan-like states persistently at one another's throat. Four centuries ago, Minneapolis

would have waged war on St. Paul, Baltimore on Washington; Massachusetts would be descending by land and sea upon Connecticut; California would consist of a dozen turbulent kingdoms. The states of our nation still have local pride and loyalty; they can upon occasion show resentment toward others of the family; the old phrase "this sovereign state" is mouthed defiantly; but all these things have lost their physical meaning, they do not imply banner and battle-axe and dismembered bodies. Our country's imperial area has been swept clear of all probability of armed conflict, as has that other area held by England, Scotland, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Each member of this wonderful group of nations that go to make up the British Empire has not only cleared its own bounds of strife, but is pacific outward in its conduct toward its fellows of the league. Over a region upon which the sun never sets, the fighting instinct lies like a paralytic, its sinews all unstrung by some hidden force.

Two truths thus become clear regarding combat, truths of moment. The first is, that while combat springs from an instinct of measureless antiquity, and perhaps never to be regarded dead, never impossible to rouse to fury; yet in a form of society that is widespread the instinct in all individual relations has been put under bonds. The victory here is greater than appears. For when another eyes us face to face, this is for most of us the one most critical of situations. Our instinctive and undisciplined character now feels a strain and stimulus that never can normally come from a stranger miles away. The actual confronting sets nature in motion, and makes possible some crisis of pity or of hatred that the mere rumor of him and of what he in the distance is doing to other distant men is powerless to effect. Emerson would have been willing to have the outcome of some Roman campaign reversed to set aright the answer of a school-girl in his presence, such is the force of this direct relationship. Yet in these immediate and personal situations, with their power to call forth antipathy, the human passions with most of us are so muzzled and in leash that they may growl but cannot

spring and crunch. Two Germans glaring at each other in a Leipzig alley, incensed at some unneighborly intrusion, or a chance word about a wife, are in a situation that speaks directly to the primal instinct. Yet they keep the peace, only to join in a homicidal rage against a stranger, upon occasion of a courteous but unsatisfactory reply from some Russian or Frenchman leagues away, addressed to a gentleman in Berlin whose name at the moment has escaped them or whom from rumor they personally dislike. What hot-house trick of breeding has here been forced upon the mind; what clear departure from all that it shows by native disposition! The citizen's fighting-blood runs hot or cold at a nod from an official in a revolving chair. What could display more perfect control and schooling!

Indeed the more perfect the machinery of governmental fighting, the more completely must the individual surrender his will, his resentments, into the hand of others. The more he serves in barracks and in camp, the more must drill and discipline drive whimpering into some corner of his being whatever original and instinctive pugnacity yet remains. Without a word—not to speak of protest with fist or murderous weapon there in his hand—he must brook official severity that is often insolent. Thus in the soldier, even more than in the civilian, has instinct been given bit and bridle.

The other truth concerns the fighting response, not of the individual but of organizations. For it has been said that you may control men singly, but men in masses are not to be controlled. Here the slumbering passions of our nature awaken to stalk forth blear-eyed, obeying no longer the laws of the individual mind, but only those of the mob.

Yet we have seen organizations of men converted after the manner of individuals. The old allegiance to family and clan and tribe, to city and shire and state and petty lord, which once seemed incurably given over to armed animosity and assault, has throughout widest realms been schooled to some other manner of expression. The circles within which an organization might not attack its fellows

have steadily enlarged while becoming fewer in number. These larger fighting units, like individuals, must never assault except when the nation gives the word.

In the fact of organization, consequently, there is nothing that makes inevitably for homicide. At first by force, but later by habit and free preference, the family, the tribe, the city, the constituent state, have carried into their outward relations the same pacific manner which formerly they had reserved for those within.

If war, then, is to abide with us forever, this will not be because of an instinct which never can be controlled. The fighting instinct is controllable, and indeed has been controlled in all manner of situations save those of a special kind, where at their surface nation rubs against nation. Here as yet there has been installed no proper means of cooling and prevention; and heat develops, and a molten burst of flame. But it is idle to say that human nature makes this forever unavoidable. Let us with more temperance say that it has not as yet been avoided. For in its fighting, human nature has shown itself singularly responsive to training good or bad—ready to fight if left to its own undisciplined impulses, ready to fight also when combat is the order of the day and is expected; but ready to live at peace if peace has been drilled into thought and habit.

Those of more subtle bent, or who—as the Bishop of Cloyne would say—have been debauched with learning, will here turn and rend us, saying that any discipline which makes man peaceable does not affect his real nature, but only its outward expression. At heart he still is ravening; you have but to change his circumstance, but to remove the artificial conditions, and up into his eye comes the old murderous look.

So let it be for the moment, since it leaves undenied the vital fact. Let it be that our “real nature” is what we have by mere private physiology, without co-operative effort, and apart from institutions—what each would be were he suckled by a wolf and cast forth without learning even the law of the pack. And let all civilization be but



artificial, something into which human nature has been shaped by influences from without. Yet the practical question is not whether war as we now have it, frequent and stupendous and central, is inevitable in some "natural" and wolfish state; but whether it is inevitable in a state of civilization such as ours of to-day and to-morrow and of the long stretch to come; inevitable when human nature, define it as you will, is hedged about by institutions, and a common desire, and an organized effort. I do not know that those who strive for peace would refuse to accept it, were it a result not of nature but of art. The quickening truth would be that human nature, brutish as you will, cannot make impossible so fair an issue.

But what in justice should we say of this strange core of us? Must we recognize that what we really are is only the tiger and the ape? I am ready to look at human nature sitting with stone club in some bone-strewn cave, and to find a deep import in its rude drawings scratched on the cavern's wall. But I see no reason why such documents should have sole and canonical authority; why the nature so revealed should in some pre-eminent sense be regarded as his "real" nature. If we hesitate to give equal weight to the clear sight of human nature in the rare spirits of past and present, may we not at least use as evidence our average citizen in tweed, who pays his debts, and runs his own second-hand typewriter above which hangs the face of Abraham Lincoln? Shall we not find a revelation of human nature in whatever human nature accomplishes? Humanity can suck marrow out of an uncooked bear's bone crushed with a rock, but also it can with toil and sad patience express its dissatisfaction with this kind of life. Out of the springs of its own nature it can draw the means to control its nature; and the success in so controlling reveals the inner reality as truly as do the ungoverned impulses that need control. Civilization is not something imposed by an outside influence upon human nature; it is **an** expression, a revelation, of human nature, showing what man can do with his unpromising self. By its own inventiveness and self-discipline, by its own cumulative and

co-operative use of an abundant inner and outer means, humanity shows the stuff of which it is made.

The nature so revealed—ready both to command and to obey, amazingly educable for war as well as for peace, but steadily enlarging the bounds within which onslaught may not be—such a nature cannot be pointed to as an insuperable and permanent obstacle to a better ordering of the world. The demand for the control of war is modest; few would clamor for perfection over night. But it does seem compatible with human nature, that when intelligence and planning and discipline have done their work, war should figure in the daily life of our leading nations much as does the possibility of assault in the mind of the average New-Yorker. He knows that he can have an encounter if he wishes; he knows that fighting occurs daily in back streets; but he himself is not busied every moment of his day with large planning for attack and defense. Yet in such a city human nature somehow gets along with human nature of every tint and shade of knowledge and creed and politics and race and tongue; and with no government descended direct from heaven, but rather with a sorry human instrument with which men bungle on to success.

The difficulty of a like change in the life of nations is great; there will be need of intelligence, inventiveness, patience and impatience, coolness and daring. The task will be arduous enough, even without imagining obstacles. For it *is* an imaginary obstacle, that the human heart is pledged and by its very essence forever fated to an unbridled lust for the blood of the alien; that it will forever lay down its life for certain strangers, and yet deliberately slaughter other strangers, just because somewhere between the groups there runs an artificial administrative line. The task is indeed great, but in the past such tasks have served as a challenge, and the will of man in the presence of difficulty is imaginative and indomitable.

GEORGE MALCOLM STRATTON.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.